

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

BOOK REVIEWS

In the beginning: Science and scripture confirm creation

Brian Ball (Ed.). (2012). Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association

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In the beginning is a work of significance and brings together a wealth of useful information—how could it be otherwise when so many of its authors are widely published and respected scholars. This book consists of 17 chapters: eleven on theological themes, six more closely related to science and one critiquing social Darwinism. The editor, should be congratulated on bringing together so many contributing viewpoints. Although “aimed at the average reader” (p. 10) it is pretty solid nourishment, as acknowledged by the editor himself, and one’s thinking cap must be firmly in place when working through some chapters, such as Richard Davidson’s quite technical essay on different readings of Genesis 1 and 2.

Those looking for excellent material on the authority of Scripture, the origin and reliable transmission of the book of Genesis, its theological themes, its significance for the canon and its utilisation by not only Christ but the NT writers will not be disappointed. Some of this content, such as Rob McIver’s work reinforcing the credibility of the ancient text, represents recent research and has not, to my knowledge, featured in earlier Adventist publications on Origins. Additionally, the discussions of design aspects and the limits of neo-Darwinian evolutionary mechanisms are offered at greater depth than in most previous Adventist monographs.

The book is double barrelled in that it purports to aim simultaneously at two quite different groups: those “that *a priori* exclude

the existence of the supernatural” (p. 9) and others for whom “theistic evolution has replaced the biblical view of Creation” (p. 13). As noted above, it certainly presents cogent arguments in support of a Creator God and biblical authority, which might be said to address the first target group with bullet-like precision. The focus on the second audience, however, seems less precise, perhaps more like that of a shotgun than a rifle!

In fact, few theistic evolutionists would take issue with most of the valuable evidence presented. The same is true of some other theists who, while not persuaded of a full evolutionary scenario, still find the evidence for old life on Earth convincing. All such, whether Adventist or not, affirm that the biblical text has primacy in all matters related to faith, all recognise it as God-inspired and divinely guided, all acknowledge the importance of Genesis in establishing the major biblical themes and all concede the significant use made of Genesis by the NT. Also, while there are different views on how best to articulate the design argument, all are happy to acknowledge evidence for God as cosmic designer. Further, most if not all theistic evolutionists, as well as a few of their atheistic colleagues, admit some limits to the naturalistic mechanisms proposed by Darwin.

There are two shortcomings that might be raised against *In the beginning*. The first is that it does not substantially address the biblical arguments advanced by thoughtful Adventist, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish scholars, among others, who do not adhere to a literalistic reading of Genesis. While not questioning Scripture’s primacy and authority such individuals substantially share Galileo’s view in the context of the last great schism among Christians over a matter of science that “the Bible is there to tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go”. Some might feel that a serious discussion of origins should at least acknowledge opposing arguments. Consequently, those seeking to understand more completely, or to oppose more effectively, the many scholarly Christians who entertain a less traditional exegesis may be disappointed.

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While, to be fair, *In the beginning* does not claim primarily to present scientific data, some might also lament its failure to mention scientific evidence which appears to implicate life in some of the deep geological history already acknowledged by many conservative Adventists to embrace billions of years. Despite claims urged in this book, these data are not seen by all as being adequately addressed by earlier Adventist publications. Such data include correlations between radiometric studies, ice cores, deep ocean and lake sediments and successive soil layers, among other dating methods.

The second problem concerns minor inaccuracies. Whilst most essays are of a high standard, the book is marred in some places by a lack of precision. In the opening lines of the Foreword, for example, it is stated that Adventists have rejected the contention that the created order is many millions of years old. This is only

partly true since many conservative Adventists, including some contributors to *In the beginning*, accept conventional scientific ages for the abiotic universe. Such inexactitude is not in keeping with the overall scholarly standards of this important and timely work.

Overall, *In the beginning* is a most interesting and valuable contribution to the origins discussion. [TEACH](#)

